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**B. Lister (a cura di), Meeting the challenge. International Perspectives on the Teaching of Latin, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2008**

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**Bob Lister (ed.), *Meeting the Challenge: International Perspectives on the Teaching of Latin*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008. Pp. viii, 168 (pb). ISBN 9780521690430.**

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In July 2005 an international conference on teaching and learning Latin was held in Cambridge. The title was *Meeting the Challenge: European perspectives on the teaching and learning of Latin*. An international panel of teachers and researchers gave papers about various and different subjects, from Latin with Information Communication and Technologies (ICT) to Classical Heritage and Modern Western Culture.<sup>1</sup> Some years later, Bob Lister, one of the organisers of the meeting, collected some of those papers and the above interesting volume. The book aims to be a summary of the most interesting research perspectives on Latin didactics and gives some useful and important assessments about Latin teaching situation in the world. The eleven papers examine four important themes: a) the place of Latin in the modern curriculum; b) methods of learning the Latin language for beginners; c) the exploitation of ICT in Latin teaching domain; d) ways to promote Latin language and civilization in the future.

The book begins with an impressive introduction by Bob Lister, who summarizes the main topics and gives an evaluation of all the inserted papers. The subjects can be divided into the following four groups.

Group A contains the first three papers: D. Taylor, "Inspection and introspection: classics teaching in England over four decades" (pp. 9-20); P. Seranis, "Poor relation or necessary evil? The place of Latin in the Greek curriculum" (pp. 21-30); L. Crump, "A contemporary subject for contemporary Europe: the much-disputed role and relevance of Latin at Dutch gymnasia" (pp. 31-43). The history of teaching of Classics in England from the Sixties until today, the difficult place of Latin in the Greek school curriculum and the reflection about the role of classical gymnasia in Netherlands offer a panorama of different experiences that show some common elements: 1) the difficulty of justifying the existence of Latin in the curriculum; 2) the risk that teachers may "wish to accentuate the more obviously exciting features of the classical world" instead of worrying themselves "with grammatical eccentricities that characterised some traditional approaches, making Latin seem like a impossibly fiendish sudoku";<sup>2</sup> 3) the risk of a progressive and never-ending reduction of the importance of Classics in modern society. Against this idea Laurien Crump stresses that Latin can be a useful "key to contemporary society", and so its role is still surely great. The same problems

and difficulties may be found in other countries, and the problems described above and the solutions adopted for them are similar in all Europe.<sup>3</sup>

Group B contains two papers. The first, by Deborah Ross, "Latin pedagogy at the University of Michigan, USA: linear reading using a linguistic perspective" (pp. 44-53), describes a learning and teaching model offered by the University of Michigan that consists of a paraphrasing system based upon the generative grammar of Noam Chomsky and modified by Knudsvig, Seligson and Craig; this method underlines the idea of the expectation of the reader, who asks himself the different possible meaning of the words and of the syntax features of the sentence during the reading phase; every word can raise questions and comprehension of the text comes from the answers to single ones. Another reading method for Latin beginners is suggested by Toon Van Houdt, "The strategic reading of Latin (and Greek) texts: a research-based approach" (pp. 54-70), that aims to build real readers of Latin and Greek texts by stimulating metacognition of personal strategies and continual self-assessment and evaluation of progress in learning. These papers underline the weaknesses of the traditional system of teaching, suggesting the replacement of the common substantialist perspective in grammar teaching (subject, object, predicates and so on) with a more linguistic-oriented method that can also satisfy the questions of sense and legitimacy of Latin teaching asked by a lot of students.

Group C includes four articles: Will Griffiths, "Increasing access to Latin in schools" (pp. 71-90); Irene Burch, Simone Hiltcher, Rudolf Wachter, "Did you catch that word? *Latinum electronicum*: an interactive online Latin course for university beginners" (pp. 91-106); Steve Hunt, "Information and communication technology and the teaching of Latin literature" (pp. 107-120); Licia Landi, "Technology is culture: a new opportunity for teaching and learning Latin" (pp. 121-134). The four papers describe different school experiences in the fields of language and literature teaching, starting from CSCP (The Cambridge School Classical Project) to *Latinum Electronicum*, an interesting and useful tool for beginners developed by some researchers of Basle and hosted by the Swiss Virtual Campus. I want to underline especially the contents of the articles of Landi and Hunt. Licia Landi's work on the interaction among ICT and Classics develops strong links between Latin language, Ciceronian thought and *humanitas*. Steve Hunt's essay focuses on the advantages of using ICT in the classroom, the value of the available resources and a sample lesson about Horace *Ode* III, 30; it is particularly useful because it leaves the pure theoretical level to engage in the real practice of everyday didactics.

Group D includes the other two papers: Rudolf Wachter "Latin and European language history" (pp. 135-149) and Kenneth Kitchell Jr. "Promotion of the classics in the United States: new initiatives for a new millennium" (pp. 150-164). These present a general picture of the meaning of Latin studies in Europe and the situation in the USA, stressing the necessity of joint effort among the teachers of modern and ancient languages and the need to maintain Classical studies, mainly for cultural reasons.

This book is clearly addressed to English and American readers and is very close to Anglo-Saxon Latin teaching problems. Nevertheless, it can be useful even for teachers of other European countries. It would be important to think also of other similar outputs in order to widen the perspective to the countries of Southern Europe, where

Latin teaching is not yet seen as a *malum necessarium*.

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**Notes:**

1. A [second conference](#) was held in Venice in 2008.
2. D. Taylor, p.15.
3. For instance, in Italy, where Latin is compulsory and not optional in most secondary schools, there is also a strong opposition to Latin teaching, considered out of fashion and far from the needs of modern society: see my book *Insegnare latino. Sentieri di ricerca per una didattica ragionevole* (Novara 2007), pp. 25-35 and the recent *Latino perché, Latino per chi*, an inquiry about Latin teaching in Europe issued by the cultural association Treelle of Genoa, that is [freely downloadable in pdf format](#).

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